



Customer Service Communications Guide

Table of Contents

Introduction – DJJ Quality of Service Standards	3
Written Correspondence	4
Receipt and Handling of Mail	4
DJJ Business Correspondence	6
Email	8
Managing Files	8
General Principles	8
Subject, To, and cc lines	9
Sending and Responding to Email	9
Message Tone, Courtesy, Length	11
Email Replies, Signatures	12
Handling Inappropriate Emails	12
Telephone Communications	13
Answering Incoming Calls	13
Taking Phone Messages	15
Handling Impatient, Rude or Threatening Calls	15
Answering Your Own Phone	16
Making Calls	16
Voicemail	17

Remember the “golden rule” of customer service and treat customers that way you would like to be treated. Correspondence, Email, and Telephone Communication are powerful tools to help you be more efficient and effective. Using them correctly to support the business activities of DJJ and providing good customer service should be the goal of all DJJ staff.

DJJ Quality of Service Standards

The State of Georgia envisions the need to improve services to all customers served by state agencies statewide. The goal is make customer service an integral part of every transaction in the state. State agencies are asked to simplify access to state government (Easier), speed up processes (Faster), and create a cultural focus on customer service (Friendlier).

The customer service mission of the Department of Juvenile Justice is to provide the highest quality customer service by a well-trained professional staff which promotes efficient and effective relationships with our customers.

The DJJ Quality of Service Standards are:

- **GREET** customers promptly and courteously.
- **LISTEN** and verify your understanding of the customer's needs.
- **HELP** customers with your answers and actions.
- **HONOR** your commitments in a timely manner.

The following standard business practices regarding written, electronic and spoken/telephone communications are included. This information is being provided to all DJJ employees with the expectation that these practices will be used to improve our communications with our customers.

Written Correspondence

Introduction:

Receiving and sending mail using proper business correspondence language and style is essential to good internal and external customer service. Proper business correspondence provides needed information and leaves customers with a favorable impression of you, your department, and DJJ in general. Customers will treat you with more respect and are willing to go out of their way to assist you when you correspond in a professional manner. Maintaining organized and effective filing systems of paper (and electronic) records ensures efficient retention of records and the proper disposal of unnecessary records.

This guideline is not intended to provide technical guidance of how to write effective business correspondence, but rather how correspondence should be used for the business purposes of DJJ. Staff that need training on how to access or write business correspondence should inform their supervisor so that arrangements can be made for training on effective business writing.

Receipt and Handling of Mail:

1. Incoming and outgoing mail must be handled in a timely and prompt manner. Incoming mail will be delivered to the correct person or unit; outgoing mail will be placed for outgoing pickup so as to minimize delay in sending.
2. Mail addressed to the Commissioner of DJJ shall be forwarded unopened to the Commissioner's office at the correct address.
3. Mail will be responded to in a prompt manner with attention to quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information provided.

Identifying Suspicious Packages and Envelopes:

Some characteristics of suspicious packages and envelopes include the following:

- Inappropriate or unusual labeling
 - Excessive postage
 - Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
 - Misspellings of common words
 - Strange return address or no return address
 - Incorrect titles or title without a name
 - Not addressed to a specific person
 - Marked with restrictions, such as "Personal," "Confidential," or "Do not x-ray"
 - Marked with any threatening language
 - Postmarked from a city or state that does not match the return address, or possibly mailed from a foreign country

- Appearance
 - Powdery substance felt through or appearing on the package or envelope
 - Oily stains, discolorations, or crystallization on the wrapper
 - Lopsided or uneven envelope
 - Excessive packaging material such as masking tape, string, etc.
 - Rigid or bulky package or envelope
- Other suspicious signs
 - Excessive weight
 - Ticking sound
 - Protruding wires or aluminum foil
 - Strange odor

If a package or envelope appears suspicious, do not open it.

Handling of Suspicious Packages or Envelopes:

- Handle the package with care. Do not shake or bump the package.
- Isolate the package and look for the indicators listed above.
- Do not empty the contents of any suspicious package or envelope.
- Do not carry the package or envelope, show it to others or allow others to examine it.
- Put the package or envelope down on a stable surface; do not sniff, touch, taste, or look closely at it or at any contents which may have spilled. Shield yourself from the package or envelope.
- Alert others in the area about the suspicious package or envelope. Leave the area, close any doors, and take actions to prevent others from entering the area. If possible, shut off the ventilation system.
- Wash hands with soap and water to prevent spreading potentially infectious material to face or skin. Seek additional instructions for exposed or potentially exposed persons.
- If at work, notify a supervisor, a security officer, or a law enforcement official. If at home, contact the local law enforcement agency.
- If possible, create a list of persons who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized and a list of persons who also may have handled this package or letter. Give this list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials.

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov

FBI Advisory on Suspicious Letters or Packages

<http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2006/september>

DJJ Business Correspondence

1. Where possible, use state watermark stationery of the first page of official correspondence. Subsequent pages can be printed on regular bond paper.
2. Use a standard block style for letters and memoranda. DJJ word processing software has readily available style forms. Use Times New Roman 12 point font for all correspondence.
3. Margins should be: top – 2 inch; right and left – 1 inch; bottom – 1.25 inches.
4. Page two and subsequent page continuation should include: name of recipient, page number (spelled out – page two) and the date (spelled out – January 31, 2007). This heading should be in the uppermost left corner of each page after page one.
5. There are many style handbooks and other resources available. Make it your goal to become familiar with good standard business etiquette in writing and sending correspondence and striving to send the best correspondence you can. Always use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation in your written correspondence.
6. Remember that use of official letterhead and postage is for business use only and never should be used for personal reasons.
7. Always spell check and read your correspondence before you send it. Remember that the spell check feature of your word processing software will not always catch errors of spelling or usage; it is important to read and edit your message as a draft before you mail your correspondence. Once you mail your correspondence, it's too late to correct mistakes.
8. Always use correct departmental letterhead with the state seal or printed address envelope for official correspondence. (see below)

Avery D. Niles, Commissioner

Unit Director's Name & Title
Office/facility name
(e-mail address)



Department of Juvenile Justice

Unit Street address
City, GA zip code
Phone: Fax:

Folding and Inserting Correspondence for Mailing

1. DJJ business correspondence should be folded correctly before being inserted in an envelope. Letters should be folded in thirds as follows:
 - Bring the bottom third of the letter up and make a crease.
 - Fold the top of the letter down to within 3/8 inch of the crease you made in the first step then make the second crease.
2. The creased edge made in the first step goes into the envelope first.
3. Use this process for 8 1/2" x 11" business stationery with a No. 10 envelope; executive stationery with a No. 9 or a Monarch envelope; 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" stationery with a No. 6 3/4 envelope.

Source: Adapted from *The Gregg Reference Manual*, Tenth Edition, McGraw-Hill Irwin, 2005

Types of Mail and Shipping

1. An excellent source of information regarding postal regulations, types of mail services (registered mail, certified mail, receipt return, etc.) and current rates can be found on the web at <http://pe.usps.gov/>. Staff should be aware of the costs of postage versus using a shipping service such as FEDEX or UPS for document delivery.
2. Larger offices and facilities should keep certain shipping supplies on hand in advance of need. Due to the cost of shipping and postage, staff should be aware of these costs so decisions can be made about whether it is preferable to send a letter via US mail, use email or use a shipping service.

Email

Introduction:

Remember that any email sent by any user is capable of being forwarded to others anywhere on the Internet. For this and other reasons, always be sure that your email will withstand professional or ethical scrutiny and uphold the policies of DJJ. Also, e-mail records are subject to Open Records Act requirements, subpoena or discovery in a lawsuit.

This guideline on the use of email is not intended to provide technical guidance of how email systems work, but rather how these tools should be used for the business purposes of DJJ. Staff that need training on how to access or use the DJJ email system should let their supervisor know so that arrangements can be made for DJJ information system orientation and training.

Managing email files effectively:

1. Delete email you do not need in all of your files or folders so that system storage capacity is not taken up with documents that are unimportant.
2. Be familiar with the DJJ policy on record retention.
3. Do not allow your email system to be shut down because your electronic mailbox is full. This is a needless inconvenience for you, your customers and the OTIS staff who maintain the email system.

General principles regarding the use of DJJ email:

1. DJJ email is for staff use only and for business purposes only. Remember that you may be the first and only contact a customer may have with DJJ and the impression you make is what the customer will remember about DJJ after their business is completed.
2. You are always responsible for your own email. Do not give your password to others and do not ask others for their passwords. This does not mean that certain users cannot authorize a proxy user that can view their calendars or email, etc.
3. Remember at all times that DJJ has certain policies related to confidentiality of information. Confidentiality of client and certain other forms of information applies to email correspondence just as it does to other means of communication.
4. Recognize that email may not be the best means of communication for every situation. Sometimes a phone call is better than email; sometimes regular mail is preferable. Keep your message recipients in mind when deciding whether to use email as your means of communication.

Subject line:

1. Writing a helpful subject line in your message is essential. Creating a meaningful subject line that reflects the subject of your message aids your recipient in knowing what your message is about before they read the full message and also aids in file management should the recipient place your message in a folder.
2. If you are replying to a message but are changing the subject of the conversation, change the subject too - or better still, start a new message altogether. The subject is usually the easiest way to follow the thread of a conversation, so changing the conversation without changing the subject can be confusing and can make filing difficult.

The "to" and "cc" lines:

1. The person(s) to whom you are addressing your email is the primary receiver(s) of your message. If you are asking for a response in your message, this is the party that should respond, not those who are copied (cc or bcc lines).
2. Do not confuse who the email is "to" and those who are copied ("cc"). Persons copied on email are not usually responsible for any response.
3. Business e-mails should be copied to those who are directly involved with the subject of the email and has an interest in what is being communicated (including those copied on an earlier message in the same "thread"). Staff who have a role or involvement in the subject or issue at hand can later be surprised if they are not kept abreast of developments in a situation in which they have some interest or responsibility.

Sending and responding to email:

1. If you work in a position that requires the frequent use of email, you should check your incoming email regularly and frequently throughout the work day. Checking email regularly enables you to respond promptly to email messages that can be either routine or urgent.
2. Always try to respond to email the same day you receive it, as soon as possible. Even if you do not have all the information you need to fully respond, you should send a brief response acknowledging receipt of the email and letting the sender know you will develop your response and respond timely.
3. If you know you are going to be away from your office for a day or more, you should change the setting on your email to give others an automatic response that you are not in the office and information on when you expect to return. You can add to your auto-response message contact information on how you can be reached. You can also provide information on an alternate contact who can respond to urgent situations in your absence. When you use the auto-response message that tells others you are not in the office, be sure to switch this feature off when you return to the office.

4. Remember that your email message reflects on you, your unit and the department. Strive to make a good impression with your email messages. If your email message is poorly written or contains errors, this detracts from the message you are trying to communicate to others. Strive to have readers of your email focus on your messages and the ideas they contain, not your errors.
5. Along with the greeting line for salutation "Dear Tom", there should be a complimentary closing in business e-mail messages. Email closings can be informal such as "Sincerely yours"; "Hope all goes well"; "Give my best to staff at ..."; or "Hope to see you soon" for example. The receiver of your email should feel some connection with you as the sender after reading your message.
6. Always use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation in e-mail as you would in other written correspondence. Avoid the temptation to think of email as less formal than regular mail and lower your standards for content and style. There are many on-line resources and tools, as well as system software features to help you with spelling, grammar, punctuation and style; you should use all of these resources to develop your skill and become a better writer.
7. Use correct punctuation and avoid sending messages using all capital letters. Also, avoid using excessive exclamation points. Use standard punctuation. Note the effect of sending a message like, "SENDING EMAIL IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS IS THE EMAIL EQUIVALENT OF SHOUTING!!!!!! DO NOT EVER DO THIS!!!!!!"
5. Avoid using informal abbreviations or acronyms for things you would not abbreviate in formal written correspondence (such as LOL for lots of luck or laughing out loud). There are some exceptions such as the use of FYI (for your information) or certain commonly used abbreviations such as M.D. to refer to a physician, JCO for a reference to a Juvenile Correctional Officer, DJJ for the Department of Juvenile Justice, etc. but there are limits to the appropriate use of abbreviations.
6. It is not acceptable in business communication to use the practice common in personal email of using "emoticons", the small "smiley face" and other cartoon-like icons (or regular punctuation arranged to stand for these symbols) intended to convey a mood or emotion. You probably would not even consider doing this if you were mailing a letter – email should be no different.
7. Always spell check and read your email before you click "send". Remember that the spell check feature of your email will not always catch errors of spelling or usage. It is important to read and edit your message as a draft before you finally send your message. Once you send your email message, it's too late to edit your message or correct mistakes.

Message tone and courtesy:

1. Always pay close attention to the tone of your email messages. Your message should always convey a professional and courteous tone. E-mail messages should not become back and forth arguments with a lack of tact or sensitivity to the issues at hand (and the parties involved in them). As an example, please note the difference in tone between writing, "Send this to me at once," and writing, "Please provide this information as soon as possible. Thanks." The person who receives the second message is likely to feel better about taking action than the staff who received the first message. Phrases like, "It would be very helpful if..." or "I would appreciate your help with..." or "Thank you for your work on..." to show appreciation for information or service being provided or to ask for service in a respectful or sensitive manner.
2. Avoid public "flames" - messages that are sent out of anger. One of the greatest features of email – speed of response – carries with it the risk of sending an inappropriate and regrettable response before the sender has taken time to develop a proper response (if a response is even needed). Calm down and think before starting a "flame war" or keeping one alive by contributing to it.
3. Remember to say "please", "thank you" and use other basic courtesies in your messages.
4. Although speed is one of the main benefits of email, don't expect an immediate response to your message. Just because you don't get an answer from someone right away does not mean that you are being ignored. Even when staff are in their office, they could be away briefly or for the day, on leave, etc. (remember to use the "out of office" setting in these instances when possible for just this reason).
5. If you do not receive a response within a reasonable time, it is not discourteous to re-send your message or send another message.

Length of email:

1. Try to match your message length to the importance of nature of your communication. If you are making a quick inquiry about a simple matter, keep your email message short and to the point. Even in longer messages, stick to the point.
2. In general, keep to the subject as much as possible. If you need to branch off onto a totally new and different topic it is preferable to send a new message. This permits the recipient the option of filing it separately under the new subject.

Email replies:

1. Include the entire “thread” of email or at least enough of the original message to provide a context. Including the pertinent part of an original message helps the recipient to understand your message within the proper context. Including the entire message helps avoid information being taken out of its original context (you are in effect editing other peoples’ work).
2. It is appropriate to accurately paraphrase the contents of a lengthy email when you are forwarding certain information to another user. When you do this, include only the minimum you need from the original message. Use only the smallest amount of text you need to make your context accurate and clear.
3. Ask yourself if a reply to a message is really needed. Messages sent to you as one who is copied on a message and one not sent “to” you often does not require any response.

Email signatures

1. An email signature is the inclusion (often through automatic formatting) of certain information about you as the sender.
2. Email signature often includes information such as your name, title, office address and phone number, fax number, etc.
3. Signatures are a good idea but are subject to abuse. Balance is the key to a good signature. If you use an email signature, keep it short and only four or five lines in length.

Handling inappropriate email

1. Do not open suspicious email. Such email messages can contain viruses or offensive or otherwise inappropriate information. Delete these messages without opening. If you feel such an email needs attention from the DJJ Office of Technology and Information Services (OTIS), complete a Help Desk Request.
2. Threatening email will be handled in accordance with the office or facility’s emergency plans (see DJJ policy 8.16 – Emergency Management and policy 8.15 – Reporting Special Incidents).
3. Remember that you are a professional and do not take criticism targeting the agency personally. Try to remain diplomatic and polite. Getting angry with a customer will only irritate an already unpleasant situation. There is never an excuse for staff getting “down” to the level of a rude caller. Do not respond to a rude, threatening or inappropriate email message.

Telephone Communications

Protocol for answering incoming calls in DJJ offices and facilities:

1. Remember that you may be the first and only contact a customer may have with DJJ and the impression YOU make is what the customer will remember about DJJ after the call is completed.
2. Answer the telephone promptly, before the third ring if possible.
3. Before picking up the phone receiver, discontinue any other conversation or activity such as typing, or talking with others that can be heard by the calling party.
4. Speak clearly, distinctly and slowly enough in a pleasant tone of voice to be understood by your customer.
5. Always identify yourself and your unit, followed by an offer of assistance, (for example: "Good morning, this is Ms. Smith at the DeKalb RYDC, may I help you?")
6. Use the hold or mute button when leaving the line so that the customer does not hear distracting conversations or other interfering sounds nearby.
7. If you need to transfer a call, explain to the customer that you are doing so and where you are transferring them. Do not transfer a call without first asking "May I transfer you to xyz" or something similar. Your calling party may not have the time or may not wish to have their call transferred.
8. If the customer has reached you in error, be courteous. Sometimes a customer may have been transferred from another office with only a simple question. Make your best effort to route the customer to the correct person or office so their time and other DJJ staff time is not wasted.
9. If you are already on the phone with a customer and another customer calls, you should:
 - a. Ask the first caller to "Please hold."
 - b. Place the first caller on hold.
 - c. Answer the ringing line saying, "[Department name]--please hold."
 - d. Place the second caller on hold.
 - e. Return to the first caller and complete the call.
 - f. Go back to the second caller and say "Thank you for holding, may I help you?"

10. If the called party is not available at the time, the following responses or something similar should be used both to protect the privacy of the staff and to give your customer a tactful and helpful response:

The Situation:	Sample of what to tell the customer:
The called party is out.	"I'm sorry; she is not in the office at the moment. Would you like to leave a message on her voicemail or can someone else help you?"
I don't know where the called party is.	"He has stepped out of the office. May I take a message or would you like to leave a message on his voicemail: or can someone else help you?"
The called party is at lunch or in the restroom.	"He has stepped out of the office. Would you like to leave a message on his voicemail or can someone else help you?"
She hasn't come in yet.	"I expect her shortly. Would you like to leave a message on her voicemail or can someone else help you?"
She is off or on leave today.	"She is out of the office for the day and won't return until tomorrow. Can someone else help you or would you like her voicemail?"
The called party is in a meeting and cannot be disturbed.	"He is unavailable at the moment. Would you like to leave a message on his voicemail or can someone else help you?"
The called party is on the phone.	"I'm sorry but he's on another line right now, would you like to hold or may I take a message and have him return your call?"

Screening incoming calls:

1. Answer the phone by saying: "Hello, [Your name & department name], may I help you?"
2. If the caller asks to speak (for example) to the Director, ask "May I tell him/her who is calling?"
3. Ask the caller "May I tell him what this is in regard to?" (if appropriate)
4. Transfer the call.
5. Wait for the Director to answer.
6. Inform the Director with the name of the caller.
7. Wait for a response as to whether the call will be taken.
8. If the called party wishes to take the call, complete the transfer.
9. If the called party cannot take the call, offer to take a message, have another appropriate staff person take the call or offer the customer the chance to leave a voice mail message.

Taking phone messages

1. Be prepared with pen and paper (or computer messaging) when you answer the phone. Have your office or unit phone list handy so that you have the correct information at hand in case you need to transfer a call.
2. When taking messages be sure to ask for:
 - a. Caller's name (asking the caller for correct spelling if you're unsure.)
 - b. Caller's phone number and/or extension (including area code)
3. Repeat the message to the caller to ensure a correct message.
4. Be sure to record the date, time, and your name.
5. Place the message slip in the called party's inbox (paper or computer) or in a conspicuous place in their office, such as on top of their desk.
6. Don't forget that you can transfer the customer to voicemail instead of taking a paper message, but remember to ask, "Would you like me to transfer you to _____'s voicemail?" Do not assume that the caller would rather go to voicemail. As a courtesy, always ask first.

Handling impatient, rude or threatening callers

1. Stay calm.
2. Remember that you are a professional; do not take criticism targeting the agency personally. Try to remain diplomatic and polite. Getting angry with a customer will only irritate an already unpleasant situation. There is never an excuse for staff becoming rude or irate in response to a customer that has treated staff in such a manner. Your goal should be to remain professional at all times.
3. Always show willingness to resolve the problem or conflict.
4. Try to think like the caller. Remember, their problems and concerns are important. Try to show concern for the problems of the customer.
5. Non-supervisory staff can always offer to have your supervisor talk to the caller or call him/her back if the caller persists.
6. Supervisors must be able and willing to handle irate callers. Speak slowly and calmly. Be firm with your answers, but understanding. Sometimes the irate caller just wants someone in a supervisory capacity to listen to their story even if you are unable to help them.
7. Threatening calls will be handled in accordance with the office or facility's emergency plans (see DJJ policy 8.16 – Emergency Management and policy 8.15 – Reporting Special Incidents).

Answering your own phone:

1. Answer all your calls within 3 rings. Avoid using voicemail if you are available and can take the call.
2. Always identify yourself when you answer the phone: for example: "This is Mr. Smith, Assistant Director of the Eastman YDC, may I help you?"
3. Speak clearly in a pleasant tone of voice - the caller will appreciate being able to understand you.
4. Learn to listen actively to customers without interrupting. However, if it is clear to you that the caller has reached you in error, politely interrupt the caller to let them know you think they have reached you in error; this saves the customer from unnecessarily repeating their problem a number of times (which causes irritation) as well as saving your time.
5. When you are out of the office or away from your desk for more than a few minutes, forward your phone to voicemail.
6. Observe the "sundown rule" and return all calls on the same day as received whenever possible but no later than 24 hours after the call is received.
7. Use the "mute" or "hold" buttons on the phone when leaving a line so that the caller does not hear distracting conversations or other interfering sounds nearby.
8. If the caller has reached a wrong number, be courteous. Sometimes a caller may have been incorrectly called or been transferred to you. Take the time to find out where the customer should call and then provide them with the information necessary to call the contact office or unit. If in the same office or facility, offer to transfer them to the correct unit rather than have the customer call back to another number.

Making calls:

1. When you call someone and they answer the phone, do not say "Who is this or Who am I speaking with?" Always first identify yourself then say something like "This is _____. To whom am I speaking?"
2. Always know and state the purpose of your communication.
3. When you reach a wrong number, don't argue with the person who answered the call or keep them on the line. Say: "I'm sorry, I must have the wrong number. Please excuse the interruption" and then hang up. Time is important for both of you.
4. If you told a customer you would call at a certain time, call them as you promised. If you need to delay the call, call to postpone it, but do not make the other person wait for your call or fail to call as promised.
5. If you don't leave a number or message for someone to call you back, don't become angry if they are not available when you call again.

Using voicemail appropriately:

When used appropriately, voicemail is an effective tool to maintain good customer service. Whenever possible, a DJJ phone should be answered "live" without the use of voicemail; voicemail should not be used to screen or avoid calls from customers. When used, voicemail should be checked frequently in order to return calls from customers. Voice messages should always be clear, accurate and brief. Voice mailboxes should never be allowed to "fill" causing the irritating message to customers "this voice mailbox is full."

Guidelines for voicemail greetings:

1. Leave a brief 1-2 second pause before your greeting is played to callers.
2. Include your name in the greeting (or if the voicemail is used by a group, identify the group's name, such as "This is the clinic at the Augusta RYDC," etc.).
3. Include the name of your organization, section, unit, etc.
4. Include the current day of the week; this lets callers know you effectively manage your voicemail.
5. Identify the key(s) callers can press on their telephone for immediate assistance from an operator.
6. Indicate when your customers can expect you to return their call.
7. Leave the name and number of an alternate colleague who can provide assistance in case the caller cannot or does not wish leave a message (like in an emergency).

Some examples of alternate voicemail greetings:

Out of office:

Hello, this is [Name], [Title] with the Department of Juvenile Justice. Today is Monday, May 15. I will be out of the office until Monday May 22 and am not available to take your call. If you require immediate assistance, please contact [NAME OF CONTACT] by pressing [NUMBER] after the tone. Thank you. (This message takes about 20 seconds)

Temporary absence:

Hello, you have reached the office of (DEPARTMENT NAME). I am not in my office to take your call. At the tone please leave your name, phone number and your message and I will call you back by 4PM today. If your message is urgent, please press [#] and speak with [Name]. Thank you for calling. (This message takes about 15 seconds)

Daily message:

Hello, this is [name], [title]. Today is Tuesday May 16. I'm sorry I missed your call, but if you will please leave your name, your number and a message, I will return your call promptly. If you need immediate assistance, please press [#], now. Thank you for calling. (This message takes about 15 seconds)

Holiday closing of office:

Hello, you have reached the DJJ Office of Training. The office is closed in observance of (holiday) and will re-open at 8:00 AM, Monday, January _ 2007. Please call us back at that time or if your message is not urgent, please feel free to leave a message after the tone. Thank you for calling. (This message takes about 20 seconds)

Diversion to voicemail due to busy signal:

Hello, this is (NAME) of (DEPARTMENT). I'm on another call at the moment but please don't hang up until you leave your name and your telephone number. I will call you back by [TIME] today (make sure you can meet the time). Thank you. (This message takes about 20 seconds)

Things you should do to make customers feel comfortable leaving a voicemail message:

1. Update your personal greeting frequently (daily) so it is accurate.
2. In your greeting, let customers know when you will return their call.
3. Include information in your greeting about how callers can reach a colleague who can help them if you are not available (like in an emergency).
4. If you will be away from the office for an extended period, on business or leave, change your greeting if possible to let callers know and tell them how to reach a colleague who is taking your calls.
5. Tell your callers how they can easily reach someone in real time if their call is urgent. BUT, make sure an operator or receptionist is available to answer the line during normal business hours.

Suggestions for composing your voicemail greeting:

1. Keep your recording to a maximum of about 15-20 seconds.
2. Do not say "operators are busy" - instead tell callers operators are aware of their call but are attending to others, etc.
3. Wait at least 1-2 seconds before recording your greeting. This gives time for the call to be answered and for the caller to be receptive.
4. Take your time while recording, and be sincere in your tone, as though you were speaking to a customer (because you are).
5. Remember that your voicemail can be forwarded. Leave only a professional voicemail greeting that you would not mind being heard by or forwarded to anyone inside or outside the agency (because it could be).

Leaving voicemail messages

1. Speak slowly and clearly.
2. Identify yourself and briefly leave a message on the subject of your call. Avoid leaving long messages; try to “boil down” your message with only the essential information needed for the person to return your call. You can get into the details later when the call is returned.
3. Leave the return phone number near the beginning of your message and indicate the best time for the call to be returned.
4. Remember to thank the person you are calling for returning your call.